

Pro-poor Growth Story

Delivering opportunity amid a pandemic

With the COVID-19 pandemic reaching Fiji, households dependent on tourism lost their main, and in many cases, only source of income. For women, this loss of income is particularly burdensome when coupled with unpaid care duties and domestic work.

Filling the employment gap and helping local food vendors stay afloat is MDF partner Shazcom Technology. The company devised an innovative business model of mobile food ordering and delivery in the middle of the pandemic. The 'Fiji Eats' app tapped into an under-met need for easy-access food delivery in Fiji, while also providing much-needed employment opportunities in the tourism-dependent city of Nadi.

MDF Fiji spoke with Shazcom's Karisitiana Vukivuki to find out how COVID-19 affected her family and their livelihood.

When Karisitiana Vukivuki received the good news that she would be joining the Fiji Eats headquarters team in Nadi, the COVID-19 pandemic had just forced Fiji to close its borders to international travel. The bustling town is a major hub for Fiji's tourism sector. Hotels and businesses relying on tourist dollars bore the brunt of the immediate impact and many working in the industry lost their jobs.

For Karisitiana's family, the pandemic meant the entire household lost its source of income.

"My father passed away in Syria last year, which really made things hard for the family, and my mother moved to the village. It's just me and my siblings in Nadi," said Karisitiana, fighting back tears.

At the time, Karisitiana was concentrating on her tertiary studies and often baked cakes and pies in her spare time to sell in her neighbourhood and supplement her family's income. It was through her love for baking that



When COVID-19 struck Fiji, it made a lot of changes. My siblings worked at the airport and a hotel and were laid off. There was literally no one working at home.

Karisitiana,
Call centre agent, Shazcom.

she found out about a job opportunity with Shazcom Technology, a Nadi-based ICT company developing a new, app-based food delivery platform.

Amid the pandemic, Shazcom Technology was preparing to launch Fiji Eats, a food delivery and payment platform, with MDF support. In April 2020, while selling cakes in the area, Karisitiana was approached by Shazcom Managing Director Shanil Chandra for a job interview

for a Fiji Eats Call Centre Agent position. Laughing, she recalls being interviewed that same day in her t-shirt and shorts, with Shanil and his wife reassuring her that her dress did not matter. She shared with the MDF Fiji team that she remembers calling her mother straight after her successful interview, crying with joy.

Within a week, Karisitiana had landed her first formal paying job and become the sole breadwinner in her household.

As a Call Centre Agent, her primary responsibility is to liaise with restaurants and delivery agents to ensure that orders are processed and delivered on time – a role she finds both challenging and highly rewarding.

“I’ve learned a lot. Now I’m used to talking to different types of people and talking to different directors of restaurants. The most rewarding part is when the order is delivered on time and I get good feedback from customers!” she said.

Working a daily six-hour shift, Karisitiana says her job at Fiji Eats takes financial pressure off the family. It also allows her the flexibility to continue her studies and sell her baked goods on her days off with her sister’s help – earning an extra income for the household.



Karisitiana,
Call centre agent,
Shazcom.

Baking was easy and provided good earnings at times but working for Fiji Eats has provided my family with a steady source of income to help buy food and pay the bills. I feel a burden has been lifted off my shoulders!

The company employs six Call Centre Agents and five of those staff members are women. Through the partnership with MDF, Fiji Eats has developed a business model that contributes to women’s economic empowerment in Fiji, develops female employee’s capacities and enables them to assist their families during these vulnerable times. While the pandemic has brought innumerable challenges for tourism-based economies, it has also brought new opportunities.



MDF partnered with local ICT company Shazcom Technology to develop Fiji Eats, an app-based food delivery platform, in response to the severe economic impact of COVID-19 on local food vendors.

The partnership includes supporting Shazcom with the launch of the Fiji Eats mobile app and website as well as creating informational tools to help customers, partner restaurants and delivery drivers familiarise themselves with the app-based delivery platform. The MDF Fiji team supported a social media promotion campaign to boost user sign-ups and delivery sales for two months following the launch. In the first six months since its launch in June 2020, Fiji Eats signed on **53** restaurants in three locations (Lautoka, Nadi and Suva) and generated over **USD78,000** in transactions, while also establishing six full-time jobs. Fiji Eats has also partnered with **12** delivery agents, providing them the opportunity to earn extra income.